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AUTHOR	Bjorklund, Eskil
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ABSTRACT

This newsletter reproduces a discussion between Eskil Bjorklund, former director of The Council for Studies of Higher Education in Sweden and his successor, Thorsten Nybom, concerning the Swedish Research on Higher Education Program. This program was established in 1968 to direct the organization of research on higher education and award research grants. The discussion covers the 1950s, before the program was established, through the 1980s. Initially under discussion are the conditions of research policy preceding the program's establishment, including the development of the relationship between the universities, government and the research community and the development of notions about applied social research. Next Bjorklund reviews the reorganization of Swedish higher education between 1968 and 1977. Within that reorganization the Research on Higher Education Program was established. Bjorklund discusses the tasks the program set for itself, early organizational patterns, and early interests in specific areas of research. Bjorklund then speaks about the program's relationship with the national government and its authority and the eventual emancipation from that authority along with the development of an international orientation. Considered finally are the more recent developments in the 1980s involving an intensified disciplinary orientation, a strengthened research control and a conscious ambition to internationalize. (JB)

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SWEDISH RESEARCH ON HIGHER EDUCATION IN PERSPECTIVE

Dr Eskil Björklund, Stockholm

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Editors Note

This discussion of *The Swedish Research on Higher Education Program* is from a recent collection of essays: ***University and Society. Essays on the Social Role of Research and Higher Education***, edited by Martin Trow, Graduate School of Public Policy at Berkeley and Thorsten Nybom, Department of History at Uppsala University.

Originally a Swedish initiative of *The Council for Studies of Higher Education*, the volume soon turned into a joint US-Swedish effort to discuss the role and crucial impact of research and higher education in society -both today and in a historical perspective. *Thorsten Nybom*(Uppsala), *Nils Runeby*(Stockholm) and *Björn Wittrock*(SCASSS) discuss the intellectual impact, moral responsibility and social role of German higher learning from the mid-19th century to the present days of German reunification. *Roger L. Geiger*(Penn State) and *Martin Trow*(UCB) analyse the other great model for higher education and research -the American- both historically and thematically. *Sverker Gustavsson* (Uppsala and the Ministry of Education) critically discusses the role of the OECD in higher education and research planning.

Another group of essays discusses -systematically and in a comparative perspective- some of the eternal problems in higher education: *Burton R. Clark*(UCLA) elucidates the precarious and delicate interdependence *and* competition between teaching, study and research in modern higher education and research. *Stefan Björklund*(Uppsala) and *Gunnar Bergendal*(Lund) discuss the relations between different forms of knowledge and teaching/learning, and *Rolf Torstendahl*(Uppsala) analyses the role and impact of professional knowledge in Western capitalist societies. Referring primarily to the Swedish case, *Birgitta Odén*(Lund) and *Olof Ruin*(Stockholm) discuss the general problem of external influence and intervention in higher education and research, and *Rune Premfors*(Stockholm) investigates the impact and role of scientific competence and knowledge in the realm of social planning and policy making.

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Thorsten Nybom

*Swedish Research on Higher Education in Perspective.**

Eskil Björklund -in Conversation

Thorsten Nybom(ThN):

The Swedish *Research on Higher Education Program* was inaugurated in 1971. It would be interesting to know the general and specific preconditions of Swedish research policy preceeding the Program's establishment, which initially influenced its conditions, aims and organisation. What, for example, were your own ideas about research policy in the early 1960s?

Eskil Björklund(EB):

Before 1963 I had not really thought in such terms as research policy. After having graduated in practical philosophy, I had previously had two main jobs. First, at the departments of Sociology at the universities of Stockholm and Uppsala I had been working as one of the Swedish co-ordinators of two international, comparative sociological studies. Later, I came to the Institute of Military Psychology, where I was occupied primarily with test construction and the training of interviewers, along the lines established by its first Director, the Professor of Education at the University of Stockholm, Torsten Husén.

But in 1963, I was invited to participate in the creation of a new organisation for school research at the National Board of Education*(NBE)*. A year later, I also became part-time secretary at the Social Science Research Council*(SSRC)*. Through these new assignments I was suddenly deeply involved in research policy-making and planning. These jobs also meant the beginning of a long-lasting partnership with one of Husén's collaborators at the Teacher's College in Stockholm, Professor Nils-Eric Svensson, presently Director of *The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation* -the largest independent sponsor of research in Sweden.

ThN:

I remember that Svensson, when I interviewed him two years ago, stressed the importance of the sector's own inherent dynamics in the emergence of what later became the relatively extensive Swedish school research. Can you comment on this and also say, whether your respective professional backgrounds made any vital difference to the future focus and organisation of school research?

EB:

There were mainly two background factors behind the new school research organisation. First, there were the various school commissions that had been actively working for more than 20 years. Secondly, there were the experimental activities which had been going on all through the 1950s in order to prepare for the introduction of the new comprehensive school system. In this experimental work, the role of the NBE had been that of chief co-ordinator. And so, when Svensson and I joined the NBE we were expected to continue -and further intensify- this kind of work.

But we had our own ideas about the future activities. Above all, we wanted to initiate different kinds of studies about the internal life of the schools. The 1962 Comprehensive School Bill had emphasised the importance of encouraging the pupils' ability to work independently, and one of the tasks of school research, *and* of the NBE, as we saw it, was to pave the way for such changes. Getting to your question though, about the impact of our professional backgrounds, I don't think they really had more than a marginal effect on the focus of school research. There was in the 1960s a strong political ambition to individualise school instruction, and in order to achieve this it seemed reasonable to build partly on the experience that came out of constructing school tests.

The school research efforts gradually came to include a number of projects in which departments of Education, in co-operation with school teachers and publishers of text books, developed various educational aids for self-directed studies. *Our* role in this connection though, was to make sure that there were a substantial amount of research in these combined research, development and publishing endeavors. Naturally, I also tried to supplement this mainly psychological and educational research with more sociologically oriented studies of school and society.

ThN:

Some have described what Svensson and you built up at the NBE as not just *one* part of the specifically Swedish variety of research organisation, which later was to be dubbed "sectorial research". It has been argued that school research in fact came to function as *the prototype* for this particular way of organising applied social research. How would you describe your role in this connection? To what extent was school research an integral part of a general development in social science research, and in what way did it include a genuine innovation in research organisation and research policy?

EB:

As I mentioned earlier, in addition to my job at the NBE I was also a secretary at the SSRC. In 1964, I succeeded Nils-Eric Svensson in that post, while he remained in the council as a regular member. In fact, I retained that position right down to 1978. At the

SSRC I worked to a great extent on stimulating debate on the organisation and policies of social science research, especially in the disciplines of psychology, education and sociology. This was done by means of conferences, seminars, internal study groups, informal get-togethers etc. These discussions mainly centered on the organisation of applied social research, and, not least, on the role of the Council in this process.

As a contribution to this general discussion I published two articles on *The Situation of the Social Sciences* and *The Development of the Social Sciences*. The first of those essays was written when I was participating in a series of seminars on research policy, organised by the Academy of the Engineering Sciences, in 1964-65, with the legendary Stevan Dedijer as moderator. In these two papers I was propounding the thesis, that social science research, just like research in the natural and engineering sciences, ought to be expanded *both* as funded *and* as commissioned research:

> To be able to expand and yield valuable results, all kinds of research need to have suitably designed contacts with its field of application. If this is correct it must also be valid for the social sciences.

Among the various forms of social science organisation I discussed were research and development(R&D) units at different government offices, applied research institutes for e.g. social work and education, an institute for basic social science research and an academy of the social sciences.

In this connection, of course, the school research we were then in the process of building up served as an example of how to organise applied research. It seemed obvious to me that these organisational innovations and readjustments should be based on close interaction between scholars and the funding agencies, and that new research organisations should be developed through a dialogue between traditional social science as represented by the SSRC and potential users of research, as, for example, the NBE.

ThN:

This deliberate intermingling -manifested by yourself and Nils-Eric Svensson- of the expanding sectorial research and the traditional university based research, was evidently not felt to present any fundamental problems of principle? You apparently saw no difference between what the "new" social sciences should do and the tasks posed for research funded by the SSRC? Did you rather believe this to be a joint societal project for social science research?

EB:

Yes, we looked on it as a common cause. It seemed natural to me that the SSRC should play its specific role, while the other official research sponsors fulfilled *their* clearly specified responsibilities. What we wanted to do was partly to discuss how applied social

research should be designed and organised, and partly to awaken interest among politicians in creating the resources needed for research in various sectors of society. My main argument was that a society which allocated vast resources for thoroughgoing reforms in, for instance, the social and educational sectors, should also invest in the knowledge necessary for their success, in on-going assessment of these reforms, and in the evaluation of their actual outcomes.

The question to me was not *whether* but *how* this necessary investment should be brought about. Even though we did not consider it to be entirely without problems, the essential task for us was to establish new principles and drum up the necessary resources. Above all, we wanted to point to the opportunities for research and usually did not put all that much emphasis on possible complications. There *were* indeed also complications, but that is another and later story.

ThN:

To my mind, your description here is fundamental to a proper understanding of the origins and development of Swedish sectorial research. Personally, I have repeatedly maintained that this development was on the whole at the initiative of the researchers: The idea emanated from the scholarly community -such as the SSRC- and not, as has frequently been claimed, from the growing insistance by politicians and bureaucrats that research must be directly linked to a demonstrable instrumental benefit. For example, when reading the accounts of the state and future development of the social sciences which various disciplinary groups at the SSRC produced in 1967 at the request of the Swedish government's Research Advisory Board, one finds that all the academic chairholders had an instrumental and applied approach to research. It was almost exclusively with reference to immediate societal usefulness that they asked for more money for their university departments and disciplines. Not even these prominent scholars appear to have seen any fundamental differences, or complicating dimensions, between applied and basic social research. What you just said seems to confirm this picture.

EB:

I want to comment on this by saying that social science in the early 1960s was living on very small external grants, mainly from the SSRC. At the same time there was a strong conviction that if you wanted a substantial expansion of social research in the universities, it must be done through other resources coming through different channels. Where such resources could come from was illustrated by school research. Nils-Eric Svensson and I were not the only ones who thought that you had to turn to new providers and sponsors, that social science research could only expand in collaboration with the society outside higher education. At the same time though, we felt that this collaboration must

be based on conditions and principles acceptable to the researchers. They should be ready to place their competence at the service of building a better society, but only on condition that they themselves would continue to be in complete command of their methods and results. The inherent problems and dysfunctions in these developments appeared only later, when it gradually became more apparent how -and to what extent- sectorial research tended to be steered by political and administrative values.

ThN:

I wonder if this initial inability or reluctance to perceive various complications and problems in the new research developments could be partly due to the fact that you and others regarded scientific quality and freedom as primarily related to considerations about scientific methods, techniques, and the presentations of results etc, rather than to normative issues having to do with the basic epistemic preconditions of science and its role in society? When I once put this question to Nils-Eric Svensson, he was disposed to answer in the negative.

EB:

With the benefit of hindsight, I think I would be inclined to confirm your observation. As I remember, many of us were at the time relatively unreflecting in our theories of science and research policy. We did not see the further and deeper implications of a change in the organisation and funding of research. Ever since the 1950s there had existed a rather simple and implicit faith in the potential of science and research as a means for societal change and improvement. Among behavioral scientists, with whom I had most dealings, this simplistic view of the role and meaning of science was, as I remember it, rather widespread.

ThN:

The period we have been talking about so far is an essential and necessary background to the expansion of sectorial research. Since the Research on Higher Education Program was part of this general development, I would like you to summarise the political and scientific "research ideology" that pervaded when you and Svensson started that work, in 1970-71. Had, for example, the "sectorial principle" been accepted by both the research community and research policy makers as the obvious "royal road" of modern research organisation?

EB:

In the mid 1960s, when we were discussing questions of this kind within the SSRC and in our Advisory Group at the NBE -which, by the way, partly meant the same people- we were still engaged in rather open-ended and fundamental discussions. Among other things, we discussed the possibilities of independent research institutes having no or few ties to either universities or national authorities. Our models were, for instance, the Swedish Defence Research Institute, the Norwegian Institute of Social Research in Oslo, and the various Swedish industrial research institutes, jointly financed by industry and the state. The main idea was that this kind of "neutral" institute might be better in balancing and co-ordinating the scientific demands and interests of the researchers with those of the interested users of social research.

Relatively soon though, the newly established sectorial agencies in ministries and national authorities started to live a life of their own, and the idea of building some form of independent research organisation gradually vanished in a reality where the sectorial agencies not only controlled the money, but also decided upon the future directions of applied research and on the matters concerning "relevance" and "quality" norms. In this process, the NBE and its Research Planning Bureau probably played a crucial role.

In the latter part of the 1960s, school research expanded rapidly and it also increased in societal influence and political reputation. As a consequence, the NBE soon not only came to dominate the funding of school research, but also threatened to gain control of the research agenda and determine the cognitive interests of the discipline of education. In addition, we soon discovered yet another area of conflict in that the NBE often wanted to introduce teaching aids and other innovations, before they had been subjected to any really scientific scrutiny. Rather often we heard the school bureaucrats say that they "could not afford to wait for definite research results". The ambitions of the central authority(and the ministry), *not* research quality or research results, gradually became decisive for policy. As a consequence, Nils-Eric Svensson and I began to question the integrated school research organisation in the NBE.

So, when I came to the *University Chancellor's Office* we were convinced of the necessity to create an independent research program which was *not* attached to the daily work and long term reform agenda of the central authority. *This* was, as I can see it, *the* most important conclusion regarding research policy that we drew from the status and character of school research as it stood at the end of the 1960s.

ThN:

I would like to return briefly to the research institute problem. In many countries the independent or university based research institute had become the "obvious" way to organise large scale social research, whereas in Sweden it was very early almost completely

removed from the research political agenda. Not least the traditional academic community opposed this solution. In academic circles the obvious and eternal truth was that independent research institutes posed a "threat to the very heart of the university". Your account here verifies my own impression of a specific "Swedish model" for the organisation of social research. The influence of international impulses and models seems to have been negligible. Instead, the close ties of social research to powerful central bureaucratic and political authorities became a somewhat uniquely Swedish characteristic.

EB:

Returning once more to the 1950s and 60s, one can see that in the build-up of Torsten Husén's Department of Education at the Stockholm Teachers College, with its specific tasks, such as the construction of standardised achievement school tests etc, and with its typically strong links to the school bureaucracy, his previous Institute of Military Psychology was serving as a model. Nils-Eric Svensson, for instance, has pointed to the fact that at the Teachers College the researchers saw themselves more as an important part of the school sector than as a part of a university-based research community.

The Research on Higher Education Program was, however, established within the University Chancellor's Office, which at the time was a new and rather weak central authority for the universities. Partly because of this fact, but partly also because of the peculiarities of the university sector itself, it became possible to get acceptance even for such an odd idea as a more or less free-wheeling research program, which gradually and eventually emancipated itself from the bureaucratic settings in which it was born.

ThN:

But these were still genuinely Swedish ideas about how to organise applied social sciences?

EB:

Yes. In the case of research on higher education we had from the start, as far as I can remember, practically no international contacts. These did not develop until the mid 1970s. The situation in school research was similar. While in school research there were many international contacts already in the 1960s, no foreign *organisational* models existed. It is true that some of our international partners like, for instance, the secretariats of the education and the science committees of the OECD, and the Schools Council in England, were also involved in studies of teaching and learning, but their missions and organisational patterns were quite different. In England, the Schools Council was not a national authority, it was an independent foundation which co-operated with individual,

interested teachers. In Sweden, both school research and later the -quite different- research on higher education were organised and functioned on a national level.

ThN:

Before we start talking about the establishment and organisation of the Research on Higher Education Program, I would like you to pursue the international thread a little further, and discuss Sweden's traditionally close relations with the OECD experts. It is a well known fact that Swedish school research very early on aroused a great deal of international interest, due both to its size, its findings, its political standing and impact on policy, and, last but not least, to its generous economic resources. The question is, whether this international appreciation of Swedish school research did not primarily reflect the preferences and interests of politicians and bureaucrats rather than its outstanding scientific quality. One gets the strong impression that the relations between Swedish school research and the OECD gradually turned into a "closed circular system", where Sweden soon became the "pet child" of the OECD experts and the Swedish school establishment, in turn, repeatedly pointed to the OECD experts' opinion to confirm their obvious "success". This mutual appreciation had very little to do with undisputed scientific eminence. It was -as usual in the case of OECD, one is tempted to say- a matter of shared ideological preferences, and it could be seen as an excellent example of the well-known phenomenon in politics and economics of "co-ordinated prejudices."

EB:

On the whole, I agree with this description. But one must remember that Swedish school reforms had attracted international attention since the 1940s not least on account of their political content and implications. Besides, Swedish school commissions had traditionally included a strong element of research and of qualified policy analysis. From 1963 onwards this was institutionalised through the NBE as a permanent school research program. It is within this special political context that one must understand the high appreciation of Swedish school research. But the basic criteria of the OECD were, of course, mainly political and administrative, and not scientific quality.

ThN:

Turning now to the Research on Higher Education Program, I would like to begin by referring to the fact that its establishment coincided with the period 1968-77, which is alternately referred to as the reorganisation, or the ultimate destruction, of Swedish higher education and which is best summarized in the term *U68*. To what extent is the Research Program to be viewed as part of a particular "U68-Ideology"?

EB:

I want to remind you of the fact that this Program materialised within a unit of the University Chancellor's Office which had been created in 1969, called the Educational Development Unit*(ED)*. Its main task -following the example set by the school development work- was to intensify educational development work in the universities and colleges. During the first year and a half, Nils-Eric Svensson and I worked mainly on establishing ED units at the different universities. To this end, we identified and selected individual university teachers who might function as ED consultants. It was the Committee on University Pedagogics, chaired by the Professor of Sociology and vice-chancellor at Uppsala University, Torgny Segerstedt, and with Torsten Husén as one of its members, which had initially proposed that there should be one ED Unit at the central office, and one at each university. In the spirit of sectorial research, this committee also proposed that a specific sum should be reserved for educational research and development activities, but not for independent, basic research.

The latter idea was introduced when I moved to the University Chancellor's Office in February 1970, and it immediately won the approval of my two superiors -Nils-Eric Svensson and the Chancellor, the former Undersecretary of State for Education and Director-general of the NBE, Hans Löwbeer. Beginning in 1972 we brought a number of advisors to the Research Program, mostly professors of educational psychology and sociology, as well as two practioners -Lars Ekholm, Head of Division at the Chancellor's Office, and Gunnar Bergendal, Principal Secretary of the 1968 Education Commission *(U68)*, and Professor of Mathematics at the University of Lund. The composition of the group suggests that the link with U68 came to be more important than that with university pedagogics. In addition, it was the University Chancellor Löwbeer himself who had recommended that the secretary of the U68 ought to be included in the Research Program's Advisory Group, for the very purpose of ensuring that its activities were broadened to include the role and impact of higher education in society at large.

ThN:

I wonder whether Bergendal not only represented a personal connection with U68, but also a political legitimation for a broadened Research Program and a guarantee that the Program should be understood as an integral part of the reforming approach and the ideas represented by U68? Bergendal's engagement in the Program meant that its direction and relevance could hardly be questioned, either by people from within the Chancellor's Office or by the representatives of university pedagogics?

EB:

That is probably correct, and I can add that this also coincided with my own ambitions. When I first broached the idea of a special research program, I was thinking of something far transcending the limited teaching-learning area. Gunnar Bergendal shared this ambition to a great extent, and represented a powerful interest group demanding studies in which higher education was viewed as an integral part of modern society, a point which had not been stressed by the Committee on University Pedagogics. In this way, my own interest in emphasising the scientific aspects and broadening the field of study of the Program coincided with Bergendal's and Löwbeer's interests in taking into account the specific issues of the U68 Commission. Right from the outset, then, the Research Program had three main subthemes: "The structure of higher education and its role in society", which very much corresponded with the central perspective of U68, "The organisation and forms of work of higher education" and "Evaluation: control of functions and results".

ThN:

Let's for a moment turn to the period 1971-1975. It would be interesting if you could specify the tasks that the Program set for itself. For instance, in what direction did its activities and decision-making develop during the first years, both with regard to its relations with the government office to which it belonged, and with the researchers whose interest it depended on? Then we can also talk about the principles and criteria which determined the Program's selection of projects.

EB:

The central ED Unit initially handled three different programs and therefore consisted of three separate groups, working parallel to and supplementing each other. The "Group for research projects" was just one part of the new unit, the others being the "Group for inservice training of teachers", and the "Group for development projects". The third group was to concern itself with short term planning and policy issues, while the Group for inservice training would handle further training of university teachers and other staff. The ED Units at the universities were, of course, important partners for these two groups. The Group for Research Projects, on the other hand, would build up a Research on Higher Education Program.

At that time hardly any such research existed apart from a few studies commissioned by the U68, and a number of projects with strong elements of development work, supported by the Committee on University Pedagogics. Our task was therefore to get such research under way. According to an early memorandum, the Reseach Group's work schedule included mapping out what research was needed, stimulating researchers to initiate stu-

dies in the field, following and evaluating these projects, and disseminating their results. Additionally, it also included developing procedures and securing resources for research, as well as following developments at research and "other for this area important" institutes in Sweden and abroad.

Almost immediately we invited researchers to send their grant applications and distributed money once a year to a limited number of projects. Already in 1971 we distributed 1.5 MSEK, most of which went to projects in educational psychology. We soon initiated and organised conferences, which we called "problem area meetings", where different researchers could present their own conceptions of different problems. These meetings were occasions when such accounts could also be discussed with the "planners" -a designation we used for people like Hans Löwbeer, Gunnar Bergendal and Lars Ekholm - who, in turn, were supposed to set forth what they -and hence the sector as well- considered to be the most urgent problems.

The Research Program was soon directed towards building up a substantial foundation for long-range planning in higher education. Another task we took up was the establishment of contacts with representatives of other disciplines besides education. One of first disciplines we approached was political science, and here Professor Olof Ruin at the University of Stockholm was one of our earliest contacts. At a meeting at Linköping in 1973, Ruin and his young assistant Rune Premfors, as well as a number of distinguished disciplinary representatives from other universities -Pär-Erik Back(Umeå), Lennart Lundquist(Lund) and Hans Meijer(Linköping)- participated. This group showed a genuine and immediate interest in the field, and, as a direct result, several rather major studies materialised in Stockholm and Umeå.

As early as 1972 I got in touch with two economists, Ingemar Ståhl(Lund) and Bengt-Christer Ysander(Stockholm), which resulted in two major studies. At roughly the same time, the first historian -Professor Birgitta Odén(Lund)- became involved through a conference on graduate studies and doctoral research training. Odén's engagement gradually developed into the first research study of the Program with a genuine historical perspective. In this way, relations were established and developed with a number of professors in the social sciences and the humanities. A few years later, in 1977, twelve different disciplines -eight in the social sciences and four in the humanities- had started smaller or more ambitious projects within the Research on Higher Education Program.

Since about the same time the group of scientific advisors to the Program has also regularly consisted of one professor from each of five disciplinary groups: philosophy/theory of science, history/history of ideas and learning, economics/economic history, education/psychology and political science/sociology. This broadening of the disciplinary competence in the Advisory Group has, as I see it, proved to be one of the Program's most important research political innovations.

ThN:

Was the Research Program already from the start linked with the cognitive interests and specific problems of traditional research, or was the selection of projects in these early days determined more by bureaucratic and policy priorities? In other words, was the sector not only client/financier, but also "problem formulator"? Were proposals rated chiefly with reference to their anticipated administrative usefulness or to their intra-disciplinary relevance and quality? Another, and somewhat delicate, question in this connection would be whether the initially strong position of the discipline of education was due to the actual state of its scientific competence or to the Research Program's specific priorities and focus of interest?

EB:

Taking your second and smaller question first, during the early years we took over and supported a number of projects initiated by the Committee on University Pedagogics. One of the researchers involved here, by the way, was the Professor of Education at the University of Gothenburg, Ference Marton. These projects were almost exclusively pedagogical, and so, during the first three years, more than 70 per cent of the money went to education and psychology. It was for the very purpose of redressing this bias, that we got in touch with representatives of other disciplines. They were expected to shed light on the more general, societal problems of higher education, which also had been raised by U68.

But it took some time before we received qualified applications from these virgin fields of study. For the evaluation of research proposals we naturally tried to apply the same criteria, as the SSRC used. But there was a complication here. Whereas the SSRC had only one criterion, that of scientific quality, the Research Program had another criterion which carried just as much weight, namely "practical relevance". Even though these two criteria in principle should complement each other, I think it is fair to say that in the first years of the Program practical relevance took priority. A research project which was rated high as regards practical relevance was sometimes accepted even if there could be some doubts about its scientific quality.

One should also bear in mind that in the early years there were rather few highly qualified researchers who wanted to get into this comparatively new field of research. Hence one of the main tasks of the Program was the building up of a basic fund of competence among researchers. This necessarily meant that many of the early projects had the character of doctoral training projects, with a fairly high element of risk. As you very well know yourself, it is very difficult to make a realistic assessment of the capacity of a doctoral student, even if the competence of the applying professor/supervisor could be

appraised. And so the outcome of such investments varied quite a lot, with some of the projects turning out to be successful and others ending in failure.

Another comment I want to make in this context is, that at the beginning of 1970s Swedish researchers often had rather respectful attitudes towards top civil servants. Even in the Research Program the researchers and advisors felt as if they were sitting in the lap of the authorities. One certainly knew that the final decision on individual projects ultimately rested with the national authority.

ThN:

If you should try to summarize the essential characteristics of the Research Program during the period 1971-75, what specific aspects would you emphasise? Do you remember if you already had a clear ambition of breaking free from dependence of the national authority? If not, when did you first understand that by admitting active scholars into decision-making within a formal bureaucracy and thereby initiating a process of "scientification", you were also going to build in tensions that would eventually become acute and end up either in an autonomous research council or a complete bureaucratic take-over?

EB:

As I pointed out earlier, the emancipation of the Research Program from its bureaucratic setting was a gradual process over a long period of time. From the beginning we had explicitly stated that the Program should, "not function as a research council which awards grants on the basis of applications". And this was then seen as a very crucial characteristic. Hence it was not until the mid 1980s that it was possible to publicly admit that the Program's advisory groups in fact had begun to function as a research council already in the latter part of the 1970s. There were at *that* time some important changes in the Research Program, including everything from its actual content to its status. And in this process, the changes of content preceded those in status. I believe these transitions could only be understood if we take two seemingly unrelated factors into account. The most important was the general upheaval in Swedish higher education caused by the U68 reform proposals. The other was the considerable freedom of action the Chancellor had given to the new ED Unit in his Office. This unit was not to be a part of the regular bureaucratic line organisation, and the Research Program could, *in its turn*, be independent within this relatively autonomous unit.

Having said this, however, one must repeat the strong dependence of the Research Program in the first part of the 1970s. It was primarily through later developments that the Program gained its independence. Not until the second part of the 1980s did the Re-

search Program come to be formally governed by an autonomous research council with a majority of researchers and a few vice chancellors and rectors instead of the "planners".

ThN:

Moving on to 1975, I would like to know what happened at about that time to make you mark that year as a turning point. Were the changes you are talking about primarily organisational, or did they also include aims and content?

EB:

The changes in the Program included all these aspects. Besides, I guess it's fairly natural that after some years of a program you try to evaluate what has been achieved, and you start thinking of how to carry on in the future. Accordingly, in 1975 we undertook a fairly radical appraisal of our actual selection procedures. In a memo I summarized the criticisms that had been made of various aspects of the activities of the Research Program. It included points like:

a) The proportion of doctoral training projects was too high.

b) The studies were governed more by pure research interests than by sectorial needs.

c) The researchers had difficulties in delivering on schedule.

d) Certain professors participated both in the capacity of applicants and of reviewers/advisors.

e) The selection of projects was made without due regard to scientific quality.

f) The selection didn't take sufficient account of the most urgent problems in higher education.

g) Projets were often poorly connected with international research and tended too much towards general investigations and policy studies.

On all those -partly contradictory- points I thought the criticism to be, by and large, well-grounded. So, in the Advisory Group we began to discuss what measures could be undertaken to deal with the shortcomings. The internal discussion led to a number of changes: From then on, the research applications had to be specified in the same way as when applying to the traditional research councils. We also introduced a system of peer-review by outside researchers. Furthermore, we demanded that our research advisors use the same criteria of quality as the research councils, and that each of them also present a written evaluation of the applications coming from her/his own discipline. All in all, these changes made the Advisory Group function like a research council, though it

was still not a research council in the proper sense of the word, since the formal decisions on grants were still taken by the Chancellor's Office.

Another event in 1975 which made this year a turning point was that through the agency of Torsten Husén I got to know the American sociologist Martin Trow at Berkeley, California. On a tour of the USA I visited a number of institutes for research on higher education. The journey proved important, because I then understood that there was, on the whole, little true research in this field also in the US. In fact, most of the studies in higher education actually being done there were policy studies or "institutional research". They were typically local investigations aiming directly at the improvement of the daily activities of the university concerned. No coordinating agency of any kind was to be found for the limited scientific research being done in the field. Instead, it was based on the interest of a few eminent researchers who devoted part of their efforts to the problems of the universities. Among those were, for example, Burton Clark (Yale/UCLA), James March(Stanford), Robert Merton(Columbia) and Martin Trow (Berkeley).

These scholars, however, did not see themselves as "higher education researchers", but rather occupied central positions in their various parent disciplines. The specially designated "departments of higher education" that I visited at some of the universities were, on the other hand, more concerned with the training of university administrators than with basic research.

My new-found insights from this journey also resulted in Martin Trow's participation in our first international conference later that year. In the fall he also served as Visiting Professor at the University of Stockholm, and undertook a study of the Research on Higher Education Program. All this taken together -the Advisory Council, the disciplinary orientation and the internationalisation- make it natural for me to treat 1975 as a year of definite change.

ThN:
Do you see these qualitative transformations as elements of a single and integrated process?

EB:
Yes, and in this connection I would also like to stress the importance of Trow's report on the Research Program. In it he made an illuminative analysis of the best way to stimulate the development of knowledge about higher education. What Trow underlined, and this certainly made a deep impression on me, was that to further promote the development of knowledge and inquiry in *any* field of study, the single most important thing to do was to create an active research community. A working community of the researchers

concerned was far more important than the selection or outcome of any individual project. To illustrate the principal points of the reorientation, and why I thought it crucial that the Program be led by researchers instead of planners, I want to quote from one of Trow's many articles, published already in 1965:

> If you look to science for certainty you are likely to make the scientists cautious and trivial. Since, if they cannot risk being wrong they are not likely to be right about anything really important. That, I think, is what happened to much of what is called 'educational research', which has been paralyzed by its assumption of responsibility for action.

But to remind you, once more, of the actual situation in Sweden, I would also like to quote from a letter I wrote to Trow in December 1975:

> We are here presently much more working on building an innovation and development community, and the idea that we also need a research community on higher education is not so easy to sell.

That was the general situation in the fall of 1975, and from 1976 onwards I saw it as a main task of the Research Program to build up a working research community. And in these efforts I continued to have a very constructive working relationship with Martin Trow both through his visits to Sweden and through my own visits to his university.

ThN:

But the lack of quality and international orientation you were referring to, and which was also mentioned in your overall assessment of the development of the Research Program down to 1975, was nevertheless only *one* type of criticism put forward. There was also the opposite kind, referring mainly to the Program's lacking connection with "the sector's problems and acute interests". What happened to these objections in a situation where you were actively advocating Trow's "disciplinarisation" strategy? To me, at least, his arguments seem to have been a vigorous rebuttal of the possibility of identifying any kind of admistratively defined "sectorial interest". Instead, the relevant problems, according to Trow, are formulated by good researchers in a viable research community. The fact that Trow, just like yourself, was realistic enough to understand that this research community could never be built up in direct opposition to the presumptive financiers in politics and the bureaucracy, alters nothing in this connection.

Perhaps I could formulate my question as follows; was it then, in 1975, that you and some others around the Research Program first came to understand that one cannot expect politicians and bureaucrats to be capable of adequately formulating the long term knowledge needs of a particular sector of society? Instead, this task is best performed by *-and is indeed the duty of-* active researchers. Was this also the time when you began to hope that the responsible politicians and administrators would eventually realize that

this division of labor probably is the one most likely to meet the demands for long term practical relevance as well?

EB:

Yes, this is roughly what some of us thought to be the way in which the Research on Higher Education Program should develop. What you call Trow's "disciplinary strategy" was of course, what was characteristic of my parallel work at the SSRC. But as I said before with the Research Program we saw it as our task to create new and different conditions and frameworks for the distribution of grants. In the beginning we had a rather crude conception of these issues. In the Newsletter from the ED Unit, of January 1973, we published something called "The Chancellor's problem list", which we expected would serve as a guide in the planning and selection of relevant studies. It is true that this "wants list" was based on a number of conferences between researchers and planners, but its character was, nevertheless, that of a very simple "laundry bill".

Gradually though, we became somewhat more sophisticated. There were certain planners, like the Head of Division at the Chancellor's Office, Ulla Åhgren-Lange, who tried to formulate longer and more coherent problem overviews from a specific planning perspective. These surveys were meant to function as a kind of check-list for researchers who wanted to formulate their topics of inquiry in response to the demands of practice. On the other side we also encouraged a number of interested researchers to produce overviews of knowledge and literature, drawing on their own discipline-based theories and concepts. These different kinds of overviews, together with the reports from our many "problem area meetings", were seen as important points of departure for the continuing work.

The central importance of these "guides" distributed in the "Reports from the Chancellor's Office", was never questioned, because we were still more or less convinced that it was through meetings and dialogue between researchers and planners that the most relevant problems in the sector would be articulated. Later, in the early 1980s, there was a further shift of emphasis when we began saying that it was only by promoting truly scholary studies that one could provide a plausible frame of reference for the future direction of the Research Program. This was openly stated, for instance, in the Program's 1985 overview Newsletter:

> The theses that theoretically significant research is also practically useful and that it is important also in the human sciences to reformulate practical problems so that they can be studied scientifically, were accepted as basic preconditions for this Program. The long term aims of such efforts, quite simply, is that of greater self-understanding in the universities and colleges."(The Program should be 'higher education's own research concerning the foundations of its own activities.')

This insight, of course, implied that the criteria of relevance now had more to do with knowledge and understanding than with administration and planning. One consequence was that we -the researchers, advisors and Program secretariat- began to make more conscious efforts to integrate ourselves into the international research community, through conferences, comparative studies and publishing.

ThN:
Would you like to extend your comments a little on how this "scientification" and internationalisation of the Program actually came about, and perhaps also comment on its simultaneous emancipation from the national authority?

EB:
I could perhaps illustrate this process by describing the international conferences, and how they changed over time in both organisation and content. At the first two conferences -1975 and 1978- a Head of Division at the Chancellor's Office was chairman of the organising committees. In the former case, publishing was done by a Dutch publisher, with a substantial Swedish printing grant. That conference was, by the way, organised in collaboration with the Council of Europe. The 1978 conference, on the other hand, was published in the *National Board of Universities and Colleges(NBUC)* series of monographs in English.(In 1976, The Chancellor's Office had been renamed the NBUC).

Political planning and administration were the main themes of the 1978 conference, just as it had been in the previous one. Sweden's ambitious reforms in higher education formed a very stimulating background for the debates at these conferences. But they were at the same time also conferences, more or less characterised by the manner of asking questions and giving answers typical of some of the humanistic and social science disciplines mentioned earlier. Among the papers given there was, for instance, a seminal one by Professor Tony Becher of the University of Sussex and Professor Maurice Kogan of Brunel University, on *Process and Structure in Higher Education System*, which two years later was expanded into a book under the same title.(A second revised edition will appear in 1991.) The discussions at this conference, and later also among the researchers and advisors of the Program -Gunnar Bergendal must be mentioned as one of the most active- led to number of studies on the inner life of higher education, focussing specifically on the development of knowledge traditions in different disciplines, as well as in some of the professional and semi-professional schools.

By contrast, if we then go to the conference of 1983, it was the political scientist, Professor Olof Ruin from Stockholm, who chaired the organising committee. Ruin had, for a few years in the late 1970s, also been Deputy Chancellor of the NBUC. The rewritten

papers were published in three volumes, each summerizing a particular subtheme of the conference. The books were edited by the researcher in charge, in the NBUC monograph series. At the 1987 conference the Uppsala historian, Professor Rolf Torstendahl, chaired the program committee, and hosted the conference. The responsible researchers for each subtheme are editing the volumes, but these will shortly be put out by two leading international publishers -one British and one American.

Over time then, there has been a transition from policy discussions to problems and issues generated by research. At the same time, the international conferences have become more central to the Research Program's development. This, of course, is not only reflected by the conferences mentioned, but also through many other, usually discipline-based, meetings abroad which the Program's researchers nowadays regularly attend. Research on higher education in Sweden, even though it started as an integral part of Swedish sectorial research, has gradually become an active member of the international research community.

ThN:

Is there a connection between the Program's capacity for resisting pressures from its bureaucratic and political environment, and its firm establishment in the international research community? Is it -to put it plainly- the case that the growing autonomy of the Research Program is partly a result of the fact that the Program's continued development is no longer only a Swedish concern? In other words; Swedish research on higher education, today, is not just a recipient, but also an active contributor within an international scholarly network?

EB:

You certainly have a point here. With a slight touch of sarcasm, it is sometimes said that the Research Program is actually more popular abroad than at home and that the Swedish Government and the NBUC, after losing control over the Program, became less interested in its activities. But I don't think that this description is correct. If, for instance, one moves to the last couple of years, one finds that both the present University Chancellor(the former vice-chancellor of The Royal Institute of Technology, Professor Gunnar Brodin), and the Government, through the Minister of Education and the Under-secretary of Higher Education, have recently asserted that the special value of the Research Program is closely linked to its independence. The authorities have openly and repeatedly conceded that regular contact with the international research front, and institutional autonomy, are both crucial to the Program's capacity for generating relevant knowledge on higher education and research systems. They have also agreed that the introduction of new ideas and theories from the qualified international research de-

bate is very important in Sweden with its traditionally more practice oriented discussions. I personally looked upon the recognition of the Program's character and autonomy in the 1988 Budget Bill as final confirmation that we had developed appropriate forms for the Research Program and its activities.

ThN:

But doesn't this also illustrate another important point, namely, that the particular form of internationalisation chosen by the Program was rather new and unique in the Swedish context? Instead of a close affiliation with politico-bureaucratic organisations like the OECD, which traditionally had been the obvious international collaborators for Swedish education and science policy-making, there was suddenly an agent of government developing close relations with a community of active scholars?

EB:

Yes, and here I think you are touching on something that has been particularly important in the development of the Swedish Research on Higher Education Program. As you know, the OECD played an important -and sometimes detrimental- role for the university and science policy in many of its member countries by introducing a new broader research concept in the early 1970s: "Enlarged Science Policy". In the Swedish context this came to be called "Sectorial Research" or even "R&D Research"(!). This particular way of integrating "research" in the various societal sectors, and deliberately blurring the boundaries between research, development work, policy studies, official inquiries and practical reform work, was strongly recommended by the OECD, especially from the early 1970s. But even if this conception of research became very popular in Sweden, the Research on Higher Education Program rather soon made it a special point to question precisely this integrated type of "R&D Policy".

On my initiative, we organised a conference in 1976 -in co-operation with The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation, the NBUC, the NBE and the SSRC- about different ways of relating science and research to practical applications. After that these questions were made a priority field in the Research on Higher Education Program. A number of studies were published and some of them were, I dare say, both highly relevant and of great scientific importance. The impact of these studies did a great deal to secure the institutional autonomy of the Program. They were also seminal in giving Swedish research on higher education a marked profile in international research. At the same time, and independently of the research activities, Swedish politicians and administrators responsible for higher education of course, continued taking part in the OECD and in other international policy-oriented organisations and activities. As regards the Research Program though, I must repeat, that from now on it became far more important to

acquire the frames of reference for research from leading scholars in different key disciplines than from leading politicians and administrators in the sector.

ThN:

Let's return, for a moment, to the period 1975-79 when this "scientification" started. I know that this process was by no means unproblematic. As I understand it, these years were, if anything, a period of protracted disputes about principles. Your difficulties in securing the autonomy of the Program were probably connected with the fact that you no longer had the immediate support of Nils-Eric Svensson. In January 1975 he had left the ED Unit to become Director of The Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation. But probably more important than the change in personnel was the general impact of a very special research policy climate. Could you briefly characterise how this conflict became manifest in various circles: the NBUC, the Advisory Group, and the research community?

EB:

One must understand that this conflict had at least two dimensions, even in the NBUC. Partly, it had reference to the growing tensions and intensified disputes within the *R&D* Unit(the ED Unit had been renamed in 1976). There was, for example, the problem of presenting results and publishing. Not until the fall of 1983 did the Research Program get its own Newsletter. Before that, it had a joint periodical with the other programs of the R&D unit, by the guaranteed obscure title of *R&D for Higher Education.*

But as you said earlier, the growing tensions very much derived from the fact that an autonomous research program must, after all, form a part of a research community, not of an organisation for planning and policy studies. So there was a conflict between what the NBUC considered to be its well-founded and legitimate interests, and the necessary "antibureaucratism" of an autonomous, if still centrally funded, research program. When looking back on what happened, I can well understand why my colleagues in the NBUC insisted that this conflict should be resolved by an integration of the activities in the R&D Unit, including also closer affiliations to the NBUC. In the spirit of sectorial research they of course, considered my "separatism" to be both inadequate and dysfunctional. It would obviously have been much easier for the R&D Unit to deal with its environment in the *NBUC* if it had agreed to be an integrated and "bureaucratically intelligible" organisation. That is why I can perfectly well understand those who pursued the "integration strategy".

To illustrate their basic standpoints and arguments, I would like to quote one of my sharpest -and therefore, in a way, most helpful- inhouse critics, the former chief-negotiator for The Central Organisation of Swedish Academics, Bertil Östergren, who later be-

came political editor of the conservative daily in Stockholm, *Svenska Dagbladet*. At a conference in 1977, he went straight to the point by saying:

> Unlike Eskil I cannot see any meaning in making a distinction between development and research projects. I have worked with both but never understood why such a delimitation should be drawn.

Östergren, and the many who thought like him, wanted no independent program for research. Instead they wanted to organise innovatory sectorial activities in large, combined projects of limited duration. These projects were supposed to integrate all kinds of research and development activities -long and short range research, development work, policy studies, the training of personnel, etc. It was probably very much due to my own personal convictions and persistance that this particular line of action did not prevail. And as the battle went on I was, of course, made aware of the fact, that my restiveness caused much irritation, both in my immediate surroundings and in the rest of the NBUC, sometimes also including the University Chancellor himself!

But even if my ideas at times were met with fairly solid resistance, I was also often supported by a number of people in the NBUC, including one or two of my closest colleagues and not least, usually also by the University Chancellor. I was also backed by the Advisory Group where, among others, Gunnar Bergendal -by then Rector at the Teachers College in Malmö- continued to be influential. Additionally, there was now the support of a research community which already had begun to establish itself nationally and internationally. This support gradually became more apparent. One of the earliest expressions of this new "research front" was at a conference in 1977, where these matters were discussed, and where also Bertil Östergren participated.

ThN:

I would like to add something to your description of the "Östergren strategy" as a natural, and from a social psychological point of view understandable, administrative perspective. In my opinion this attitude, emanating essentially from the sector's short term needs and long term preferences, is also to an eminent degree a reflection and expression of the dissolution of the traditional research concept, which the expanding sectorial research in Sweden had actually entailed. The new sectorial concept maintained that for almost every type of inquiry one could use the label "research". The notoriously amorphous concept of "R&D Research", advocated by Östergren and others, was not only an inherent consequence of bureaucratic functionalism, but also a question of what the Professor of Theory of Science in Gothenburg, Aant Elzinga, later came to speak of as "epistemic drift".

EB:

Yes, and as I said earlier, the Research Program's own difficulties in administering autonomous research from within a central bureaucracy were instrumental in making the interplay between research and planning a special field of study in the Program. Those studies, some of which were partly "self-analytical", and the discussions which they helped to initiate, gradually influenced opinion among centrally placed administrators and politicians in such a way that the particular nature and position of the Research Program was more and more accepted as an established fact of life. One of the consequences of this development was that in December 1987 the University Chancellor finally formally delegated all decisions on the content of the Program and the distribution of its money to an independent council consisting of some of the leading Scandinavian scholars in the field. The Research Council, which also includes a few vice-chancellors of Swedish universities and colleges, is sovereign in its decisions and selects research projects on their scientific merits.

The autonomy of the Research Program was now not only accepted, but seen as the necessary precondition for the new role assigned to it. This role was not to produce the knowledge needed for political planning and reform, but rather to increase the universities' and the research communities' own understanding of the fundamental characteristics and dimensions of higher education and research. As a consequence, the actual content of the Program changed so much that by the mid 1980s it seemed natural to change the name of one of its central problem fields from "The governance and organisation of higher education" to "The development and organisation of knowledge"! More and more the nature of knowledge and learning as such came into focus. The center of interest became the inner lives of research and higher education rather than, as previously, their external administrative frame-work.

The impact of these changes can also be seen in the allocation of resources. During the 1980s scholars in the humanities -philosophy, theory of science, history, history of ideas and learning- received 42% of the grants, as against the 11% alotted to them in the previous decade. A corresponding relative reduction occurred in the behavioral sciences. The share alotted to education, psychology and economics went down from 65 to 31%. The third major group of disciplines -political science and sociology- on the other hand, retained their share -24 and 27% respectively- during these decades. The Program has also changed character in the sense that today a large part of the money goes to a number of established research groups, while the steering Research Council and its Secretariat have reduced their role to that of stimulating co-operation between the different groups, and serving as their discussion partners.

The staff of the Secretariat has gradually been reduced to a minimum, while the research groups themselves carry the full responsibility both for publishing and conferen-

ces. The political and administrative authorities of the higher education system are, of course, still present, but now rather in the role of interested supporters and critical readers of the publications that the research generates. As I just said, from 1987 the responsibility for the direction and activities of the Program is entirely vested in its research council and in the community of active researchers.

Publishing by the researchers involved in these studies has expanded quite rapidly, during the 1980s. For instance, between 1984 and 1989 the number of publications listed in the Program's Newsletter grew from 69 to 133 per year. The published material mainly consists of traditional monographs and papers in established scientific journals, but it also includes a growing number of articles in daily papers and popular science magazines. Furthermore, the publishing today is almost equally balanced between English and Swedish. Written contributions to the Program's conferences and seminars have also undergone a distinct change of character, both through a relative increase in the output of the humanities, and also an increasing number of eminent contributions from invited foreign scholars.

To summarize: The Research on Higher Education Program has in various ways developed and prospered in the 1980s, mainly because of an intensified disciplinary orientation, a strengthened research control and a conscious ambition to internationalise. These changes in a new and relatively small field of research would probably not have been possible had there not been a simultaneous change in Swedish policy in general. Briefly put, this change of research and science policy in the 1980s can be said to have marked a halt to the expansion of sectorial research, and a shift of the center of gravity back to the universities. Scientific leadership, disciplinary rootings and international standards have become three of the watch-words in Swedish research policy generally, and as far as now can be judged, they will remain so for the foreseeable future.

NOTES

* *Dr Eskil Björklund* retired from his position as Director of *The Council for Studies of Higher Education* (formerly, *The Research on Higher Education Program*), in May 1989. He has published a short historical account of the Program's policy and activities: *Two Decades of Swedish Research of Higher Education*, in *Studies of Higher Education and Research* 1989:2. His successor, *Dr. Thorsten Nybom*, divides his time between the Directorship and an Associate Professorship of History at Uppsala University. For an international opinion, see Martin Trow, Introduction, in M. Trow-Th. Nybom(eds), *University and Society. The Social Role of Research and Higher Education*. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London 1991, pp 9-16